

Ellis Island

Self-Guided Activity (Grades 9-12)

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Education Department
Ellis Island Immigration Museum
Statue of Liberty National Monument



Name : _____

Ellis Island: Politics!

By the late 19th Century, Ellis Island served as the focal point for immigration. Critics and supporters of immigration used the site as a platform to discuss what “qualities” immigrants should have when they arrived in the United States. In turn, Ellis Island was intended to sift through immigrants, separating out “the desirables” and “the undesirables.” The immigration debate was expressed very publicly in newspapers and political cartoons.



*Examine the political cartoons to identify some of the opinions people had about newly-arrived immigrants and compare them to some of the viewpoints shared by some people today.
(Larger, more detailed versions are available in folders labeled “Politics!” on the 2nd Floor.)*

Historic Cartoons:



How do these political cartoons make you feel about immigration in the late 1800s and early 1900s?

Why do you think people created and published these cartoons? How does each illustrator want the reader to feel about immigration?



Puck, a popular magazine at the time, also expressed strong feelings about the immigration debate. How do you think the feelings differ in this particular cartoon?

Contemporary Cartoons:



What do you think about the contemporary cartoons? Do you agree or disagree with the cartoonist's point of view?

According to the artists, what stand out as the most important message of the political cartoons?

Looking at both sets of cartoons, to what extent have these issues changed or not changed over time?
Defend your response.

Turn to the folder entitled “Cultural Identity and Language” to read several primary sources that detail how immigrants and their cultural identity have been perceived by American society over time. Use the documents as supporting evidence and read the following quotes below.

"We have room for but one language here and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as American, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house."

- Theodore Roosevelt

"Instead of worrying about whether immigrants can learn English -- they'll learn English...You should be thinking about, how can your child become bilingual? We should have every child speaking more than one language."

-Barack Obama

Examining both quotes, which statement do you most identify with? Why?

In sum, why do you think Americans have expressed such different reactions about immigration?